



Why Oral Health Matters for Children in Massachusetts

Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common chronic childhood disease, five times more common than asthma.¹ If untreated, dental caries results in cavities, pain, infection and, in some instances, devastating consequences for a child's overall health, including sickness and mortality. Untreated dental caries can inhibit learning, speech, and eating, leading to problems in school and poor nutrition. Dental caries and oral disease are almost entirely preventable.

A study conducted in 2003 found that a significant proportion of Massachusetts' children suffer from dental caries, and many of our youngest children start school with dental disease. More than one-in-four kindergarten children – about 19,130 children – had evidence of dental decay, with nearly 10,000 of those children having untreated dental decay. More than 40% of 3rd grade children – about 29,110 students – had evidence of dental decay, and about 12,400 of those children had untreated decay. About one-third of 6th grade adolescents – about 24,575 students – had been affected by dental caries, and nearly 8,000 of those adolescents had untreated decay.² Significant racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities exist within all oral health indicators, at each grade level, and among the state's 14 counties. These findings indicate that more needs to be done to prevent oral disease, reduce untreated disease and pain, and eliminate oral health disparities.

In January 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) will promulgate new licensing regulations for family child care homes and center-based programs which will require that educators assist children in brushing their teeth whenever they are in care for more than four hours or whenever they consume a meal while in care. EEC has contracted with Partners for a Healthier Community to provide training through their BEST Oral Health Program. BEST Oral Health has extensive experience training staff in child care centers and family child care homes in tooth brushing and oral health in the Springfield area. Beginning in October, 2009, BEST will offer three training sessions across the state to trainers from Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Family Child Care systems, and organizations of center-based programs. Once trained, these trainers will become a resource for other educators in their organizations and across the field.

For current information about trainings in Oral Health and other topics, check EEC's Professional Development Calendar at <http://www.eec.state.ma.us/ProfessionalDevelopment/WebFindTraining.aspx>.

For additional information about oral health, follow the links below.

To see the Head Start Program Standards regarding tooth brushing:
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Program%20Design%20and%20Management/Head%20Start%20Requirements/Pis/2006/resour_pri_00109_122006.html;1166801446188%20

For a variety of materials about oral health and tooth brushing from the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center: <http://www.mchoralhealth.org/headstart/index.html>

¹ Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General

² The Oral Health of Massachusetts' Children, Catalyst Institute, January 2008

To view the Surgeon General's report on Oral Health in America (Executive Summary),
<http://www2.nidcr.nih.gov/sgr/execsumm.htm#foreword>

To view the Catalyst Institute's report: The Oral Health of Massachusetts' Children (Executive Summary, January, 2008):
http://catalystinstitute.org/media/reports/OralHealthMass/Catalyst_Institute_January_2008_Exec_summary.pdf

For a variety of resources provided by the Office of Oral Health at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health:
http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=5&L0=Home&L1=Government&L2=Departments+and+Divisions&L3=Department+of+Public+Health&L4=Programs+and+Services+K+-+S&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_com_health_c_pca_oralhealth&csid=Eeohhs2

To learn more about Partners for A Healthier Community: www.partnersforahealthiercommunity.org.